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Vietcong Ahead in Propaganda War

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BANMETHUOT, South Vietnam, March 15 — "Rejoin your loved ones who are longing to see you. You are only being used as bullet shields by the Communists. Your Government will help you return to your homes."

Leaflets bearing this message have been floating down on towns and villages in the sparsely populated but strategically vital Central Highlands of South Vietnam.

The leaflets have been aimed at persuading young Vietnamese who have joined the Vietcong guerrillas to desert and return to their families.

The effort is part of a new campaign of psychological warfare inspired and financed by the United States and pressed upon the South Vietnamese Army by young American military advisers.

The United States is planning to expand the large information force already in South Vietnam and to provide it with more money.

In the last six weeks the struggle for control of the highlands has moved into new phase as the Vietcong try to cut South Vietnam in two. The propaganda war that has accom-

panied this drive has also been stepped up, and once again the Vietcong appear to have sped past the Government.

Vietcong agents have been matching the Government at every turn, even in the distribution of expertly printed leaflets in two colors.

Where the Government must fly over the sector in American planes equipped with loudspeakers, the Vietcong go into the villages and spend several days employing the "the three withs" — eating with, sleeping with and working with the people.

Communist guerrillas have shown unexpected speed and dexterity in spreading their propaganda in the highlands.

Regime Effort Assailed

A Vietcong leaflet picked up at Quaingduc, near the Cambodian border, contained on one side the following: "Struggle for better pay and guarantee of long life. Do not support the Government in its fighting. If you do you will die and your life will be wasted."

On the other side of the leaflet was a brief newsletter telling of Vietcong successes in the attack on the American billet at Quinhon and in closing Route 1 along the coast. It ended by saying that members of the Gov-

ernment "are fighting each other in Saigon even now."

The leaflet was dated Feb. 19, the day of the most recent coup d'état attempted in Saigon.

Other leaflets have been found all over the area promising "help and kind treatment" to regular soldiers who are "anti-American" and who "throw down their weapons."

The Vietcong have been equally quick to turn the Government's propaganda to their own advantages. Government troops recently found booklets in a number of villages. The cover was the same as that of a Government booklet explaining the protected-hamlet program; inside was a Vietcong propaganda tract.

Since the first week in February, when the Vietcong opened their drive in the Central Highlands, the guerrilla influence has trebled in Darlac Province an American adviser said.

"They always take the initiative and we can only try to run around and put out the fires," he said.

"To be perfectly honest," he went on, the Army of South Vietnam just isn't interested in psychological warfare. They think it's a waste of time even if we are willing to make most of the effort for them."